DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 415 TM 017 108

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TITLE Performance Assessment and Records of Accomplishment for Employability.
PUB DATE Jun 91
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Colorado State Department of Education Assessment Conference of the Education Commission of the States (Breckenridge, CO, June 15, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Educational Assessment; Employment Interviews; Foreign Countries; Job Applicants; Multicultural Education; *Photographs; *Portfolios (Background Materials); Secondary Education; *Student Evaluation; Student Records
IDENTIFIERS *Authentic Assessment; England (Sheffield); *Performance Based Evaluation

ABSTRACT

This paper describes uses for one component of an authentic assessment--visual records of achievement. Focus is on the uses of instant photography in visual literacy, multicultural education, and administrative applications. Using instant photography, students and their teachers can create a collection of the students' best work. That visual documentation is part of the commonly used jury evaluation of the student's portfolio. However, the same authentic assessment materials can be used to assist job-seeking students or graduates with employment interviews. While these applications are as yet undeveloped in the United States, the school-business partnership of Sheffield (England) has a comprehensive program linking school-based assessment with subsequent job placement. Under the Sheffield program, the visual records of transitory events bridge the conversation between the job seeker's most important experience to date (school) and the employer's need to know something real about the graduate's accomplishments/interests. Visual records are an important extension of the movement for reforms in student progress measurement and represent a chance for school officials to increase efficiency by re-cycling work done for school purposes to yet other goals. The larger political context of authentic assessment in the United States, the relationship between visual literacy and text understanding, and how instant photography is currently being used in the schools to build multicultural awareness and to acknowledge high-achieving students and teachers are discussed. (RLC)

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"Performance Assessment and Records of Accomplishment for Employability"

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A paper prepared for Education Commission of the States, Colorado State Department of Education Assessment Conference

Breckenridge, Colorado

June 15, 1991

Abstract

Authentic assessment centers pupil progress measurement on the tasks required of learners, especially those that are worthwhile and linked to subsequent school and non-school performance demands. Performance assessment is a related idea with special relevance to labor force preparation. It emphasizes direct measurement of desired skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Both concepts require more than paper-and-pencil measurement. Visual recording of a learner's best work can be conveniently achieved with instant photography. Those visual records can augment achievement portfoloios, but they have uses beyond the school as well.

The Sheffield, England School Business Partnership, in collaboration with the Polaroid Education Program, extended school-based authentic assessment procedures to the compilation of a wallet-size portfolio of student's best work which then has become part of the school graduate's job search arsenal.

The paper briefly describes additional uses of instant photography in visual literacy, multi-cultural education, and administrative applications.

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> Tommy McGuire's best high school work is a cherrywood cabinet that sits in his uncle's living room. Now he waits for his employment interview with JM Manufacturing, trying to guess about how best (in words he knows he doesn't have) to describe that very tangible, but very absent evidence of his craft and commitment.
>
> Tanyika LaForce has folded and re-folded 50 times the recommendation letters and graduation certificate she needs for the personnel interview. She has promised herself to be honest about the uneven course grades on her transcript. If only, she thinks, they ask about the bike trip she led for the "Y" kids or her community service work at the nursing home. In her imagination she can see clearly the smiles of the kids and the gratitude of the senior citizens: now she has to find a way to make the Personnel Office see that--and her worth.

This paper describes external and additional uses for one component of an authentic assessment--visual records of achievement. Using instant photography, students and their teachers can create a collection of the student's best work. That visual documentation is part of the commonly used jury evaluation of the student's portfolio. But, the same authentic assessment materials can be used to assist job-seeking students or graduates with employment interviews. While these applications are as yet undeveloped in the United States, the school-business partnership of Sheffield, England has a mature and comprehensive program linking school-based assessment with subsequent job placement.

This paper also describes some additional uses for the visual documentation that can support an authentic assessment activity. Multi-cultural education and visual literacy are two examples. Others come from administrative uses of instant photography for liability managment, public relations, discipline, etc.

While visual records are only one part of the reforms in pupil progress measurement, they are an important extension of that movement and represent

a chance for school officials to increase efficiency by re-cycling work done for school purposes to yet other goals. The next section reviews the larger political context of authentic assessment.

Context

To the extent that American public schools and their students have ever been evaluated, that has happened through the opaque lens of standardized achievement test scores. The limitations of those data now require supplementing. Everyone from classroom teachers to George Bush agrees with the need to augment our current metrics. Teachers complain that multiple-guess tests are unconnected to instruction, do not illuminate needed changes in classroom practice, and measure only a small, often distorted and unfair slice of student accomplishment. Many teachers are looking for ways to get beyond "skill and drill" basics instruction.

The Bush Administration wants new standards that are both higher and wider than those currently in use. One of the pivots of the President's "America 2000" reform plan is "New World Standards" in five subjects--English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. Those new standards are to be linked to the National Education Goals Panel and measured through, "...a new (voluntary) nationwide examination system..." (AMERICA 2000, p. 11). Lest anyone imagine that the Administration's proposals are an exercise in psycho-metrics, it is further advocated that results from the ("voluntary") tests nonetheless be used by colleges and universities for admission, by employers for hiring, and by communities for evaluating schools.

Finally, the results are to be publicized in a series of state and national report cards on the achievement of students and of schools.

There are yet other indicators of the ferment in testing. The Pew Charitable Trusts gave the University of Pittsburgh (the Learning Research and Development Center) and the National Center on Education and the Economy $1.15 million to develop a new national examination system. The MacArthur Foundation then awarded an additional $1.3 million to the two groups to develop graduation tests that measure high-level skills and the application of knowledge to practical problems encountered in everyday life.

When both policy makers and practitioners press in the same direction, as is the case here, something is very likely to happen.

Authentic Assessment

The core of authentic assessment is captured by Archibald and Newmann:

> A valid assessment system provides information about the particular tasks on which students succeed or fail, but more important, it also presents tasks that are worthwhile, significant, and meaningful--in short, authentic.
> (D. A. Archbald and F. M. Newmann, [1988] "Beyond Standardized Testing: Assessing Authentic Academic Achievement in the Secondary School", Reston, VA, National Association of Secondary School Principals.)

The same ideas appear from another direction in the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills--performance assessment is "Direct assessment of desired behavior." The SCANS Commission's initial task is to determine the labor force requirements of the future followed by a documentation of the school reform consequences of those new needs. (CF., Secretary's Commission of Achieving Necessary Skills, U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Constitution Avenue, NW., Room C-2318, Washington, D.C. 20210.)

Sheffield, England is an industrial city in the English Midlands. With the decline of basic steel and extraction industries, Sheffield's economic history has paralleled that of Pittsburgh. And, in Sheffield, too, business

leadership made school reform a centerpiece of economic recovery. The business community was concerned about the palpable lack of connection between the school-learning examination system and the on-the-job needs of employers. In order to forge a more useful link between the work of the schools and the needs of Sheffield's regional economy, the pupil progress measurement system was revised to include a broader, more inclusive array of performances on the part of the students. (The Records of Achievement were also developed as a way to make assessment more individual and more personal than that which was anticipated as a result of the Thatcher Government's imposition of a national curriculum.)

At the same time, each school developed in collaboration with its community a "School Validation Board" that ensured that units of study, measures of performance, and standards of accomplishment met agreed-upon standards useful to all parties. Members of those validation boards visit schools regularly and issue an annual summative report. The boards include representatives of teachers, parents, employers, local industry, school governors (board members), and other community interests.

The whole process was designed and supervised by the Sheffield Education Business Partnership (John Krachai, Old Mill Cottages, Old Mill Lane, Thurgoland, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, England) which included the public schools, the Chamber of Commerce, The University of Sheffield, and Sheffield City Polytechnic. The group was also supported by Polaroid, UK, which provided the materials and training necessary to implement the visual dimensions of each student's "Record of Achievement and Experience".

Participating secondary school students negotiate performance topics and standards with their teachers in the context of school policy. The

records are best practice accumulations of the student's work compiled, BY THE STUDENTS, over the latter years of secondary schooling. Polaroid supplied a wallet-sized portfolio that displays a dozen instant photographs and that can be carried from setting to setting as graduates seek post-secondary employment or training. The results are both vivid and portable. Those viusal records of transitory events (e.g., league champs on a muddy soccer field, the cake that was beautifully decorated but then eaten, the incandescent results of a lab experiement) bridge the conversation between the job seeker's most important experience to date--school--and the employer's need to know something real about the graduate's accomplishments and interests. All participants in Sheffield--students, employers, teachers, parents--are enthusiastic about this visual supplement to test scores and transcripts. Every family has a portfolio of their children's growth and development that is kept on the refrigerator door or the bottom drawer in a box. These visual records of accomplishment extend that simple practice to the schools and to the student's post-secondary experience. The result is learning made visible.

Other Applications

It is a policy analysis truism that "What gets measured, gets taught." Growing the range of assessment techniques and topics beyond the basic skills and beyond paper and pencil measures also has the effect of expanding the range of curriculum and instruction. Enhancing visual literacy can increase text understanding and improve multi-cultural or global education.

In discussing the relationship between visual literacy and text understanding, Sinatra et al., note

> ...(W)hen experience itself is lacking to provide relevant connections for the understanding of content texts and for the production of coherent compositions, students must face even greater difficulty in making their knowledge known through language (Richard Sinatra, Jeffrey S. Beaudry, Josephine Stahl-Gemake, E. Francine Guastello, "Combining Visual Literacy, Text Understanding, and Writing for Culturally Diverse Students", JOURNAL OF READING, May 1990, p. 612).

In short, it is tough to be imaginative or even coherent about what has never been experienced. Thus, both visual and textual literacy can be built through the exercise of illustrating or photographing things which are subsequently analyzed, recorded, and communicated in words. Sinatra et. al. suggest three strategies for what can also be thought of as a multiple intelligence intervention: 1) "INPUT", such as looking at pictures which then require that information be processed; 2) "OUTPUT" strategies, such as producing film, doing graphic design or otherwise encouraging learners to express meaning; and, 3) "INTEGRATIVE" strategies, such as forming images and creating metaphors which help learners visualize ideas and meaning. Generally, "...visual literacy provides concrete experiences that help learners fill blank areas in their background schemata" (Ibid, p. 613). Working with students from low-income families in New York City public schools, the authors documented 20 percent pre-post competency gains (Diedrich rating scale) for sixth graders in narrative and descriptive writing plus general merit increases for those students that buttressed their writing with an instant photography exercise.

Similar gains have been realized in the San Francisco Unified School District which used instant photography essays to build multi-cultural awareness among elementary school students whose photo essay assignments

included photographing and then discussing the most significant objects in each of their homes.

Finally, administrators have begun to use photography to celebrate student accomplishments through a departmental "superstar" board. Other uses include recognizing outstanding teaching, reducing liability by documenting unsafe physical conditions, and building group spirit through instant photography.

For additional information on visual literacy and authentic assessment applications, write:

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